

## PART I

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS:

#### “HISTORY IS ON THE MOVE”

*José Colen and Bryan-Paul Frost*

Although Aron believed that a “sociological” approach to war (and peace) was possible, and even necessary, he also argued that the absence of “values” in that approach or description would greatly impoverish—indeed, completely distort—it. This does not mean that all approaches and descriptions are equivalent or of equal worth: reason may not be able to appreciate the complex arrangements of an international system using a single criterion, but this does not mean that it should gratuitously relinquish its own powers. Simply put, war can be understood from a variety of better and worse perspectives, but it is never “value-free.” It is therefore no surprise that Aron was skeptical of the hoped-for convergence between political theory and economic science through the use of such concepts as the “logic of choice,” “the principle of balance,” or “quantitative variables.” The economic model of politics “does not offer a simplified or schematic portrait of political conduct, as it deforms and falsifies this same conduct.” Of course, political scientists were free to define and to use whatever models they liked (provided they were tested *a posteriori*); but any model that did not take account of the subjective meaning that political, diplomatic, and/or military agents ascribed to their conduct would not reflect reality and so would not exemplify or comport with an authentic *political* science. Even if the economic model is used simply as a heuristic tool, it still runs the risk, “under the pretext of defining an abstract theory,” of suggesting a cynical interpretation of politics as the sole truth.

Each of the chapters in this part tries—as Aron himself tried—to avoid these pitfalls. In the first place, they present a sociological analysis of a diplomatic or historical constellation without being value-free. In the second place, they present a genuinely political analysis and show that history and war cannot be reduced to economics (or any other such “rigorous” science) without fundamentally distorting them. All of the chapters therefore focus largely on the intersection between

history and praxeology, and how each informs the other. Aron was one of the few international relations theorists who put praxeology at the forefront of his analysis, but only because he had so carefully surveyed the historical landscape (and vice versa).

Jean-Vincent Holeindre's chapter explores Aron's writings on war and strategy. Holeindre begins by reminding us of the essentially interdisciplinary character of Aron's oeuvre. This is apparent from even a cursory glance at the table of contents of his massive work *Peace and War*, which comprehensively analyzes international relations by systematizing theory, sociology, history, and praxeology. As Holeindre reminds us, Aron was the first to introduce into France a sociological theory of international relations, refusing to reduce such a crucial project to the study of history or legal rules (although he integrated these two topics into his analysis as well). Holeindre also finds room for the applicability of Aron's observations to the state of war today. Aron had a great deal to say about the decisive effect that atomic weapons had on diplomacy in his era, but he also recognized the impact of psychological and guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and irregular conflicts—as waged, for example, by the Algerians and the Vietnamese.

In the next chapter, Matthias Oppermann argues that we should understand Aron's spirited defense of liberal democracy in light of his experience of the convulsions of German politics and society in the 1930s. For Aron's sojourn in Germany from 1930 to 1933 had not only introduced him to a wide array of important German thinkers, it had also underscored the fundamental fragility of liberal democracy, especially in France, and thus awakened him from his pacifist slumber and brought him back to French Republican patriotism. His commentary during the lead-up to the Second World War was a plea to his countrymen—and to any defender of liberal democracy more generally—for them to demonstrate the bravery and resolution necessary to conserve their current political system, however great its faults, in the face of the much greater threat of tyranny. Aron also discovered after the war that "history was again on the move," and he would spend much more time and effort rephrasing and reiterating his stance on totalitarianism in order to deal with its deceptively friendlier incarnation.

Raymond Aron's ongoing commentary on the Cold War is the topic of Carlos Gaspar's chapters. Here Gaspar makes extensive use of Aron's works on *histoire-se-faisant*, including his many articles published in *Le Figaro* and *L'Express*. Aron's versatility in political commentary, sociology, international relations, and philosophy placed him at a unique vantage point from which he could survey the unfolding of history little by little and integrate these details within a broader vision of the main trends of the twentieth century in particular and his philosophy of history in general. Gaspar confirms the validity of Aron's central insights into the nature of the Cold War: decolonization brought about the end of the old empires, and while the rivalry between the West and the Soviet Union never erupted into nuclear war, it nevertheless remained a "bellicose peace." Even though the liberal democracies began to reveal problems of their own, namely,

a diminished capacity for collective action, Aron had faith that the conflict between the West and the Soviet Union would result in liberty.

*Peace and War among Nations* is clearly Aron's masterpiece in the field of international relations, and Bryan-Paul Frost seeks here to unpack its main tenets. Beginning with Aron's rich historical analysis, Frost shows that although the twentieth century was unique (what with nuclear weapons and the worldwide extension of the diplomatic field), it could still be understood by using the same conceptual tools used previously—most notably, those elaborated by Clausewitz and others. In fact, Frost shows that Aron did not believe that nuclear weapons had effaced traditional notions of diplomatic, strategic, and moral conduct: the Machiavellian and Kantian dilemmas faced in the past were the same ones faced in the present. Consequently, Aron's theoretical and sociological framework was equally applicable during the Cold War as it had been in the past.

Joël Mouric discusses Aron's gradual discovery of Clausewitz, as well as the many misinterpretations and injustices from which both the German strategist's magnum opus, *Vom Kriege*, and what one might also call Aron's magnum opus, *Penser la guerre, Clausewitz*, suffered. Although it is a shame that Aron did not write the great work expected of him on Marx, his opting for Clausewitz as the subject of a major study should come as no surprise: both Clausewitz and Aron had lost their homelands for some time during a war; moreover, of all the thinkers Aron had dealt with, Clausewitz most accurately fit the description of a man who made critical decisions and who withdrew to ponder the nature of his field. In Aron's in-depth study of that man we are made privy to the various facets of Aron's thinking that justify this *Companion*: the relation between knowledge or theory and action; the interweaving of process and drama; the need to explain how our era is both fundamentally the same and fundamentally different (for Clausewitz the new factor was Napoleon and total war; for Aron it was nuclear weapons); the desire to mitigate the increasingly destructive effects of war, even if it is inevitable.

Carlos Gaspar rounds off this part with a chapter on Aron and the end of the Cold War, an end that caught everyone by surprise, but would have comforted Raymond Aron.